



CANADA
4-H Manitoba

Gerbils



The Mongolian Gerbil is a rodent. The adult is about 4 inches long plus another 4 inches for his tail. A gerbil has short brown front legs and long hind legs. They move in short hops like a tiny kangaroo.

These small, active, inquisitive rodents originated in the dry regions of Asia and Africa. They consume little food, require minimum space, are hardy, have little odour, are prolific breeders and rarely, if ever, bite. They are very friendly and amusing.

The gerbil is colorful with darker fur on the back, lighter on the sides, and almost white underneath. There are about ten different colours: agouti, Canadian White Spot, dark-tailed white, black argente, lilac, blue, cream and gray agouti.

Selection

When choosing your gerbil, look for bright, shiny eyes, perked up ears, and slick hair coat. Look for one, too, that is playful.

Facilities

A good home is one that is spacious, escape proof, easy to clean and loaded with useful items such as a wheel fitted to the side of the cage. Nesting box, plastic tubes for tunneling etc. Gerbils are very active animals which like to climb and play on obstacles in their cages especially in early morning and evening.

A gerbil is quite comfortable in an old aquarium. You can make your own heavy wooden cage or buy a small metal one. Remember to keep cage covered with metal or hardware cloth.

Furnish your gerbil with about 1 inch of litter. It can be almost any clean absorbent material. Sawdust, cedar chips, or a commercial litter is sufficient. For his bed, he will need a piece of burlap sack. He will chew up the sack and place it with the other litter along the edge of his cage.

Since your gerbil is fairly odorless, you only need to add a small amount of litter once a week and clean the cage once a month. Keep the cage dry and at room temperature between 10^o-27^oC.

Management

A small pet needs to be handled with care. To provide a sure hold on your animal, grasp the tail portion closest to the body. Cup your hands and hold the gerbil gently and firmly. Like most pets, gerbils are shy at first. You should handle him often and calm him by gently scratching his back and ears.

Feeding

Food for Gerbils:

As vegetarians, they prefer a diet of cereals and grains such as sunflower seeds, corn, oats, wheat, or watermelon seeds. Commercial food is available. Fresh grass, lettuce, bits of apple, potato chips, and peanuts are also popular foods for gerbils.

How Much to Feed (Rule of Thumb): for each gerbil, feed 1 tablespoon of food once a day. They will not overeat. If food is left, take it out when cleaning cage.

Water: provide water in a gravity dispenser in order to keep the cage dry. Your gerbil will drink very little water.

A block of wood or some green twigs to chew on are appreciated.

Health Care

Isolate and carefully check newly acquired gerbils for a minimum of 14 days. Wash food and drink containers every day.

Possible health problems include abscesses, diarrhea, parasites, heatstroke, malocclusions and sterility. With proper health care your gerbil will live to be 3 or 4 years old. They are relatively free of diseases and have clean living habits.

Health Rules

- Feed a balanced diet (include some hard foods).
- Provide a dry cage.
- Provide shade.
- Keep block of wood in cage for gerbil to gnaw on.
- Isolate pets that are sick.
- Use insecticide powder recommended for cats to control lice or fleas
(Caution: never use insecticide powder recommended for dogs.)
- Clean cage at least once a month.
- Add a small amount of clean litter each week.
- Keep room temperature between 10° - 27°C.

Breeding

Gerbils are monogamous; they believe in having only one mate at a time. If one mate dies, it is advisable to separate the new mates with a wire partition until they become accustomed to each other's smell.

Breeding Facts

- Gestation period 24 to 25 days.
- Litter averages about 5 babies.
- At 3 weeks of age, they will begin eating solid foods.
- Eyes will open within 3 weeks.
- Mother will wean babies at 6 weeks of age.
- Mature at 3 months of age.
- Will begin pairing off at 2 to 3 months of age.

Some Don'ts

- Don't disturb mother or babies the first week.
- Don't touch babies until their eyes are open.

Economics

Gerbils can produce a lot of babies in a year. These can become expensive pets if you keep all the offspring. However, if you find a pet store that will purchase your supply of baby gerbils they can provide a small income.

Project Resources



Pinterest - The Visual Discovery Tool

Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards - Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for gerbil information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering "gerbil" will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example , try gerbil diet instead of snake diet.

The following links may be of interest:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerbil>

<http://gerbils.co.uk/>

Sections of the Gerbil Fact Sheet were adapted with permission of Manitoba Agriculture from the Manitoba 4-H Project: Small Animals Leader's Manual - 1998. Portions of the fact sheet have been used with permission from Ontario 4-H and Saskatchewan 4-H Council.



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